NIH Launches NIHSeniorHealth.gov

New Web Site Features Health Information, Talking Web, Easy Access for Older Adults, Visually Impaired.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) today launched NIHSeniorHealth.gov (www.nihseniorhealth.gov, a new talking web site with formats and topics tailored to the needs of older people. The senior friendly site takes advantage of techniques developed by the National Institute on Aging (NIA) and the National Library of Medicine (NLM) designed to encourage older people to use the Internet, and this site in particular, as a resource for the best information on health and medical research.

The site was presented October 23 at a briefing requested by Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa. Harkin, whose state is among those with a high percentage of people age 65 and older, said, [3]As our population ages, good health will be important on both a policy and personal level. For all of us, that starts with the right information on prevention and treatment, which NIH is now providing seniors by means of this new and innovative web site.[2]

[3]As the Nation[1]s leading health research institution, the NIH must share what it knows with the public about keeping healthy and dealing with disease,[2] notes Dr. Elias A. Zerhouni, director of the NIH. [3]This translation of research into everyday use is a critical part of the NIH[1]s mission.[2]

[3]The way in which people think, learn, and remember, changes with age,[2] says Dr. Richard J. Hodes, director of the NIA. [3]This new web site is based on the latest research on cognition and aging and should prove to be an accessible and understandable way for seniors to find information about their health.[2]

[3]The use of the Internet for health information is increasing dramatically,[2] notes Dr. Donald A.B. Lindberg, director of the NLM. [3]But the small type, low contrast, and difficulty in navigating around many sites have been obstacles for seniors. NIHSeniorHealth.gov corrects many of those problems, as well as providing health information that is the best that NIH can offer.[2]

To do this, the NIA and NLM brought together researchers who study cognition, web site designers, and communications experts at the two institutes to fashion a site that is easy for older adults to read, understand, remember, and navigate. For example, the site features large print and short, easy-to-read segments of information repeated in a variety of formats -- such as open-captioned videos and short quizzes -- to increase the likelihood it will be remembered. Consistent page layout and prompts help older adults move from one place to another on the site without feeling lost or overwhelmed. Each topic provides general background information, quizzes, frequently asked questions (FAQs), open-captioned video clips, transcripts for the videos, and photos and illustrations with captions.

NIHSeniorHealth.gov will have a [3]talking[2] function, which will allow users the option of reading the text or listening to it as it is read to them. Finally, in addition to being senior-friendly, the new site also complies with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, making it accessible for persons with disabilities.

The risk of many diseases increases with age, so the site sponsors are focusing on health topics or specific diseases that are of particular interest to older people,

including Alzheimer¹s disease, Alzheimer¹s disease caregiving, arthritis, balance problems, breast cancer, colorectal cancer, exercise for older adults, hearing loss, lung cancer, and prostate cancer. In coming months, topics will include complementary and alternative medicine, diabetes, falls, shingles, vision changes, and others.

Along with the NIA and the NLM, other NIH components contributing topics to the web site so far include the National Cancer Institute (NCI), the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS) and the National Institute of Deafness and other Communication Disorders (NIDCD). More Institutes and Centers will be working with the NIA and the NLM to bring on the additional topics.

NIHSeniorHealth.gov is expected to serve as a model for web designers seeking to make sites accessible for older adults. The NIA and NLM have developed a booklet, Making Your Web Site Senior Friendly: A Checklist, which gives guidelines that can be used to update any web site with cognitive aspects of aging in mind.

The NIA leads the Federal effort supporting and conducting research on aging and the health and well-being of older people. The NLM, the world¹s largest library of the health sciences, creates and sponsors web-based health information resources for the public and the professions. Both are part of the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, MD, part of the U.S.
Department of Health and Human Services.